Summary Writing

What is a Summary?
A summary is a short version of a longer work. When you summarize, you communicate the main points/ideas of another author’s writing in fewer words than that author used.

Important Tips
- Do NOT include your opinion of the work’s subject in the summary.
- Do NOT add details or ideas that are not found in the original writing.
  - A summary is a shorter version of someone else’s work, not your work.
- You MUST understand the work you are summarizing in order to accurately summarize it.
  - You do NOT have to understand every tiny detail. You just need to understand the overall point and its main supporting details.

Reading in Preparation of Writing a Summary
Before you read, skim through the reading and think critically:
- What does the title tell you about the work? Does it reveal any hints about the reading?
- Are there any headings or sub-headings? What hints do they reveal? Why are they included?
- What are the topic sentences? Do they give you a good overall picture of the reading?

As you read, think critically and take notes:
- Highlight important sentences and phrases, especially the author’s thesis statement, topic sentences, and supporting details or arguments.
- Write notes in the margin as you read, including questions about confusing parts and comments about what certain parts mean.
- Keep a list of unfamiliar or confusing words. Look them up later and re-read them in context.

After you read, organize your notes in the margin on separate notebook paper. Refer to these notes and your highlighting to help you answer the following questions:
- What is the subject or topic of the reading?
- What is the author’s main point about the subject (his/her thesis)?
- What is the author’s support, proof, or evidence for his/her main point or thesis?
- Why is the author writing about this subject (his/her purpose)? Is the author trying to inform you, entertain you, or persuade you? Explain.
- Who is the author’s intended audience? Who did he/she write to? Did this influence the writing?

Writing Your Summary
- Introduce the title and author of the work you are summarizing and provide necessary background
- State your thesis, which should be an explanation of the meaning of the reading.
  - In other words, explain what the reading means.
- Explain the main supporting details of the reading
  - Explain why it means what it means.
- Optional: Explain the author’s purpose (why he/she wrote the work)